

THE MEDIUMSHIP OF RUDI SCHNEIDER

BY THEODORE BESTERMAN

THE time has not yet come for a critical account of Rudi Schneider's mediumship, since it is still in active progress, but the publication of an important report of recent sittings in Paris with this medium makes it desirable briefly to survey his previous history. This is done below, and a review of the French report follows in the second section.

I

According to Rudi Schneider's own account the mediumship of his elder brother Willy was accidentally discovered in 1918. The father of these two mediums, Josef Schneider, is a compositor in the little Austrian frontier town of Braunau, about 70 miles due east from Munich. Officers of the Braunau garrison came to the printing works at which he was and still is employed, to buy sheets of paper. They explained that these were wanted for planchette-writing. In this way members of the Schneider family were led to try planchette-writing for themselves, and it was discovered that Willy succeeded in producing results under the purporting Control of "Olga Lintner." Gradually various physical phenomena developed and early in 1919 Willy first went into trance. One evening in March ¹ no phenomena occurred and Olga said that she wanted Rudi, at that time eleven years of age. He was brought in and phenomena began. Since that time Rudi has been a medium, producing phenomena similar to those of Willy, who secured a new Control, Mina, while Rudi took over Olga.² Rudi's trance resembles Willy's in every respect. So far Rudi's own account.³

In 1919 Baron von Schrenck-Notzing first sat in Braunau and no doubt then made the acquaintance of Rudi. But for the next few

¹ According to Mr Harry Price, *Rudi Schneider* (1932), p. ix, this occurred in November 1919, though possibly a different sitting is referred to. Elsewhere (*Journ. Amer. S.P.R.* [1926], xx. 20, 642), Mr Price gives 1921 as the date of the beginning of Rudi's mediumship. According to Captain F. Kogelnik, in *Journ. Amer. S.P.R.* (1926), xx. 146, Rudi was only eight years of age in 1919.

² This point is confirmed by Baron von Schrenck-Notzing, *Materialisations-phaenomene* ² (1923), p. 548, according to whom, however, the beginning of mediumship in Rudi, and the transfer of the Control, occurred when Rudi was thirteen, that is, two years later.

³ As printed in Dr Eugène Osty and Marcel Osty, *Les Pouvoirs inconnus de l'esprit sur la matière* (1932), pp. 16-18.

years the Baron was occupied by the study chiefly of the mediumship of Willy Schneider. Reports of his investigation of Rudi have not yet been published (though it is understood that records of 88 sittings are in the possession of Baroness von Schrenck-Notzing),¹ but his regular sittings with this medium do not appear to have begun until about 1924. In the meanwhile Rudi had given a great many sittings to others, both at Braunau and elsewhere. He first went to Vienna at the end of 1922,² and for some years thereafter gave numerous sittings in various parts of Austria, before spiritualistic societies, in haunted houses, and privately, including a series under the conduct of Herr Erich von Czernin-Dirkenau,³ as well as at the (since defunct) Metapsychologisches Institut.⁴

I will now give a summary account of the specific sittings of which printed reports are known to me (ignoring newspaper accounts).

On 26 January 1924 Rudi gave a sitting in the house of Major von Baranski, in Vienna. Among those present were Professors Karl Przibram and Stefan Meyer. They were not impressed by the phenomena and thought that they could imitate them by normal means. They apparently did so in February, with Professor Przibram as medium.⁵ This was announced in the newspapers as an exposure, but it is hardly necessary to point out that, failing a detailed account of the conditions at both sittings, the incident is of no particular significance.

According to Prof. Meyer, Rudi was also exposed at this time by Dr Lothar Lenkei.⁶ No particulars are available.

There is an affirmative report of four sittings between 21 and 27 July 1924, at Braunau, at which a variety of phenomena occurred.⁷

On 6 September 1924 Rudi gave a sitting at Baron von Schrenck's house in Munich, of which we have two reports, one non-committal⁸ and the other rather aggressively affirmative.⁹

¹ *Zeitschrift für Parapsychologie* (1931), lviii. 33.

² *Zeitschrift für psychische Forschung* (1927), p. 48

³ *Psychische Studien* (1924), li. 261. See also Wilhelm Keinzl, *Meine Lebenswanderung* (1926), p. 220.

⁴ *Psych. Stud.* (1924), li. 171.

⁵ "Die angebliche 'Entlarvung' des Mediums Rudi Schneider in Wien," *Psych. Stud.* (1924), li. 171-5; Erwin Reinhold, "'Entlarvungen' und kein Ende," *Ibid.*, li. 261-7; *Journ. Amer. S.P.R.* (1925), xix. 690-1.

⁶ Prof. Stefan Meyer, in Gulat-Wellenburg, Klinkowstroem, Rosenbusch, *Der physikalische Mediumismus* (1925), p. 453.

⁷ Prof. Richard Hoffman, "Vier Sitzungen mit dem Medium Rudi Schneider," *Z. f. ps. Forschung* (1927), pp. 48-55.

⁸ Dr Carl Bruck, "'Prinzipielle Betrachtungen' zu den Phänomenen Rudi Schneiders," *Z. f. Paraps.* (1930), lvii. 743, 744.

⁹ Dr Paul Sünner, "'Prinzipielle Betrachtungen' zu einer Sitzung mit Rudi Schneider," *Z. f. Paraps.* (1931), lviii. 33-42.

There is a brief affirmative report of a sitting in October 1924 in the house of Prof. R. Hoffmann in Vienna.¹

In the autumn of 1925 Mr Dingwall witnessed some "interesting and suggestive phenomena" in Braunau.²

To this period possibly belongs an undated sitting, reported anonymously, but introduced and therefore presumably authenticated by Dr Hans Rosenbusch. In this sitting an object had been secretly painted, it was levitated, and the medium's hand afterwards bore traces of the paint.³

In March 1926 Rudi was in Prague, where he gave five sittings.⁴ During a sitting on the 21st an interesting form of control was tried. The medium's right hand was tied to the left hand of his right-hand neighbour with a silk cord bearing three luminous balls, and his left hand was controlled in a similar way. Unfortunately we are not told how and in what position the cord was tied to the medium's hand, nor given the names of the sitters. Numerous phenomena occurred.⁵

On 28 and 29 April there were two sittings at Braunau, of which we have two more or less independent affirmative reports.⁶

Between 30 July and 19 August 1926 Mr W. J. Vinton had six sittings with Rudi in Braunau, four at the house of the Schneiders and two at the Hotel Mittendorfer. In his report he attributes the phenomena to conspiracy between various members of the family.⁷ This allegation was replied to by Baron von Schrenck,⁸ whose remarks were criticised by Graf von Klinckowstroem.⁹

In the spring of 1927 we have another report of a sitting, this time non-committal.¹⁰

Dr Prince had ten sittings, 12-24 August 1927, at the home of

¹ Prof. Hans Thirring, "Psychical Research in Vienna," *Journ. Amer. S.P.R.* (1925), xix. 694-6.

² *Journ. S.P.R.* (1926), xxiii. 19.

³ "Protokoll einer Entlarvung Rudi Schneiders," *Zeitschrift für kritischen Okkultismus* (1928), iii. 93-6.

⁴ *Journ. Amer. S.P.R.* (1926), xx. 312.

⁵ Prof. Oskar Fischer, "Ueber eine einfache Bindungskontrolle der Medien," *Z. f. Paraps.* (1926), liii. 516-9.

⁶ Harry Price, "The Phenomena of Rudi Schneider," *Journ. Amer. S.P.R.* (1926), xx. 641-65; E. Clephan Palmer, *The Riddle of Spiritualism* [1927], pp. 55-65.

⁷ Warren Jay Vinton, "The Famous Schneider Mediumship," *Psyche* (April 1927), pp. 55-65.

⁸ Freiherr A. von Schrenck-Notzing, "Vintons angebliche Entlarvung der Braunauer Medien," *Z. f. Paraps.* (1927), liv. 705-24.

⁹ "Neues von den Medien Willy und Rudi Schneider," *Z. f. krit. Ok. kult.* (1928), iii. 89-91.

¹⁰ René Sudre, "A Séance with Rudi Schneider," *Journ. Amer. S.P.R.* (1927) xxi. 395-403; cp. *Mercure de France*, 15 September 1927.

Herr Rudolf Lambert, Stuttgart.¹ Between 1 and 6 September he had three further sittings at Braunau.² Dr Prince's conclusion is expressed by him in these words: "I could not truthfully express any belief in the genuineness of the phenomena."³ His report aroused much interest. It is only necessary to mention a detailed criticism by Dr Gerda Walther,⁴ the replies of Dr Prince⁵ and Herr Lambert,⁶ which Dr Walther in turn answered,⁷ and a commentary by Graf Klinckowstroem.⁸

We have a superficial account of an unspecified number of sittings in the autumn of 1927 at Baron von Schrenck's.⁹ Unfortunately the writer was as much impressed by the fraudulent Oscar Schlag as by the Schneider brothers.

On 11 October 1927 Mr Bird had a sitting in Braunau, of which he gives us a detailed account.¹⁰ He attributes the phenomena to fraudulent conspiracy and this conclusion led to a discussion with Miss May Walker,¹¹ Major Kalifius,¹² and Dr Gerda Walther.¹³

We have a brief account of a sitting in Braunau on 29 April 1928, directed to show that Mr Vinton's theories are untenable.¹⁴

During October 1928 four representatives of the S.P.R. had several completely negative sittings at Baron von Schrenck's.¹⁵

Later in the same month I had three further sittings there, which were also entirely negative.¹⁶

¹ [Dr W. F. Prince], *Experiments with Physical Mediums in Europe* (Boston S.P.R., Bulletin VII, 1928), pp. 6-61.

² *Ibid.*, pp. 62-70.

³ *Ibid.*, p. 70.

⁴ Dr G. Walther, "Die angebliche Entlarvung des Mediums Rudi Schneider durch den Untersuchungsbeamten der Boston S.P.R. Dr W. Prince," *Z. f. Paraps.* (1928), lv. 403-15.

⁵ Dr W. F. Prince, "Hyperkritik und Fehlmethodik," trans. R. Lambert, *Z. f. Paraps.* (1929), lvi. 85-95.

⁶ R. Lambert, "Nachwort," *Ibid.*, lvii. 95-9.

⁷ Dr G. Walther, "Schlusswort," *Ibid.*, lvi. 99-104.

⁸ Graf C. von Klinckowstroem, "Die Erfahrungen von Dr Walter Franklin Prince mit dem Medium Rudi Schneider," *Z. f. krit. Okkult.* (1928), iii. 96-108.

⁹ Florizel von Reuter, "Experiments in the Laboratory of Baron Dr von Schrenck-Notzing," *Quarterly Transactions of the British College of Psychic Science, Ltd.* (1928), vii. 22-32.

¹⁰ J. Malcolm Bird, "The Current Status of the Schneider Mediumship. II. A detailed Account of my Seance with Rudi, in Braunau," *Psychic Research* (1929), xxiii. 407-27.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, xxiii. 606-23.

¹² *Ibid.* (1930), xxiv. 19-22.

¹³ *Ibid.*, xxiv. 22-7.

¹⁴ Florizel von Reuter, "A Sitting with Rudi Schneider in Braunau," *The British Journal of Psychical Research* (1928), ii. 43-51.

¹⁵ *Journ. S.P.R.* (1929), xxv. 2-3.

¹⁶ Theodore Besterman, "Report of a Four Months' Tour of Psychical Investigations," *Proc. S.P.R.* (1929), xxxviii. 433-4.

On 21 March 1929 Mr Price had a fairly successful sitting in the home of Rudi's friend Karl Amereller, in Munich.¹

Between 12 and 22 April 1929 Rudi gave five sittings at the National Laboratory of Psychical Research, London. At these sittings Baron von Schrenck-Notzing's method of electrical control of the medium was extended to all the sitters.² Unfortunately this method is very defective and deprives the series, and that next mentioned, of much, though by no means of all, their value. This method of control was criticised by Count Perovsky-Petrov-Solovovo³ and Dr Woolley,⁴ and defended by Professor Schiller⁵ and Mr Price.⁶

Between 14 November 1929 and 20 January 1930 Rudi gave a further series of twenty-one sittings at the National Laboratory.⁷ Mr Price's book includes various independent reports, of which only two need be mentioned, those of Captain F. McDermott⁸ and of Lord Charles Hope.⁹ Dr Bruck has published some theoretical considerations arising out of these sittings.¹⁰

Between 10 October and 14 November 1930 Rudi gave a series of sixteen sittings at the Institut Métapsychique, Paris, where he also spent the whole of 1931, with intervals, giving seventy-four further sittings. These ninety sittings form the subject of the valuable report¹¹ which is reviewed in the following pages.

On 31 July 1931 Mr Price and others had a sitting at Braunau. All the doors and windows were sealed and numerous phenomena occurred.¹²

¹ Harry Price, in *Psychic Research* (1929), xxiii. 288a; *Rudi Schneider* (1930), pp. 4-5.

² *Id.*, *Rudi Schneider*, pp. 7-48.

³ *Journ. S.P.R.* (1929), xxv. 163-4.

⁴ *Ibid.* (1930), xxvi. 125-6, 140-1.

⁵ *Ibid.* (1929), xxv. 175-6.

⁶ *Ibid.* (1930), xxvi. 139-40.

⁷ Harry Price, *Rudi Schneider*, pp. 49-228.

⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 128-31.

⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 193-205.

¹⁰ Dr Carl Bruck, "Prinzipielle Betrachtungen zu den Phänomenen Rudi Schneiders," *Z. f. Paraps.* (1930), lvii. 742-7.

¹¹ This report, by Dr Eugène Osty and his son Marcel Osty, first appeared in the *Revue Métapsychique* (1931), pp. 393-427; (1932), pp. 1-59, 81-121. It was then re-issued in book form under the title *Les Pouvoirs inconnus de l'Esprit sur la Matière* (Paris: Félix Alcan, 1932; price 25 fr.). All the references below are to the book.

¹² Dr Gerda Walther, "Neue Versuche von Harry Price mit Rudi Schneider," *Z. f. Paraps.* (1932), lix. 193-5.

II

The sittings at the Institut began very properly with a series of preliminary sittings "pour voir." Nothing of special interest occurred during the first thirteen sittings, with the following exception. At the third sitting Dr Osty observed coming towards the *séance*-table from the direction opposite to that of the medium, a thick greyish fog about 30 centimetres wide. When this fog reached the edge of the table top the table moved slowly for more than 20 centimetres. Dr Osty, bent over this phenomenon, clearly observed that the moment the table stopped moving the fog-like mass became instantly invisible (p. 25).

During the fourteenth sitting was first accidentally made the discovery which eventually directed the entire course of this series of sittings. For purposes of control Dr Osty (for the sake of brevity I will abstain from saying each time Dr Osty and his collaborators) had installed an apparatus which will be familiar to most readers from its use during the recent international exhibitions at Burlington House. Across the space to be guarded an infra-red (and hence invisible) ray is directed at a suitable cell, which is placed in an electrical circuit with, for instance, a bell, in such a way that if the invisible ray ceases to impinge on the cell, as by the interposition of one's hand, the circuit is completed and the bell rings. The same apparatus can be connected with, for instance, a camera and flashlight, so that an interruption of the beam causes the flashlight to be set off, thus exposing a previously prepared plate. Such a ray Dr Osty caused to be directed over the *séance*-room table, on which a handkerchief had been placed with a view to obtaining telekinetic phenomena. It would thus have been impossible to obtain normal access to the handkerchief without interrupting the ray and thus revealing the fraud or accident.

Under these circumstances was held the fourteenth sitting, the cell being connected with the photographic apparatus. On two occasions during this sitting two sets of photographs (four cameras were in use) were automatically taken by the interruption of the infra-red ray. But when the eight negatives were examined nothing in the least abnormal was observed on them. In other words, the cause of the production of the instantaneous photographs was non-photographable. The conclusion was inevitable that on these two occasions a "substance" had been present on the table, which "substance," though not photographable, was capable of absorbing or refracting not less than 30% of the infra-red ray, this being the degree of absorption or refraction necessary to put the apparatus into operation (pp. 31-5). For the sake of brevity only absorption

will be spoken of; but, in fact, probably both refraction and absorption were at work.

This important discovery naturally opened the way to various lines of investigation. The first was to ascertain whether the absorption of the infra-red ray was really due to the presence of a non-photographable substance. This was achieved by connecting the cell with a bell which would ring during the whole time that 30% or more of the ray was absorbed. The photographic apparatus was placed in a self-contained circuit so that a flash could be made at will. During the fifteenth sitting, under these conditions, the bell rang repeatedly for various periods up to 100 seconds. Photographs were taken during these periods (that is, during the interruption of the infra-red ray), without anything abnormal being recorded on the plates. Another point was established during this sitting: that the medium has a degree of control over the entry of the substance into the ray. He repeatedly announced that the force (as he calls it) was about to operate, and these announcements were usually followed by ringing (pp. 36-41).

The next step was to register graphically the disturbances of the infra-red ray. This was achieved in the following manner. In the electric circuit producing the ringing there was inserted a small electric lamp which was directed at a narrow slit in a box, behind which slit there passed continuously a roll of photographic paper. Accordingly, whenever 30% or more of the infra-red beam was absorbed a circuit was completed which at the same time rang a bell and lit the lamp, which thus produced a line on the photographic paper. This amplified apparatus was put into use in the sixteenth sitting, and the previous results were confirmed. Again an additional point was established: that the substance in question is invisible, for a part of the sitting was held in good red light, during which the usual disturbances of the infra-red ray occurred without anything been seen (pp. 41-8).

I now propose to pass over a long series of sittings, during which various experiments were conducted, some satisfactory, others inconclusive, with a view to localising the substance, measuring the duration of its presence in the ray, and its density or volume, studying the influence on it of various kinds of light, and the mental control over it of the medium. The account of these experiments should be read at pages 51-110 of the report under review.

I proceed to the experiments in which it was discovered that the substance does not usually enter into the infra-red ray, absorb a certain percentage of it, and remain constant, but rather that, during its presence in the ray, the substance as a rule oscillates very rapidly. This was established by the use of a sensitive galvanometer, which records minute changes in the electric current set up

by the absorption of the infra-red beam. It was found that the oscillations of the substance in the infra-red ray range from 120 to 420 per minute (pp. 111-6).

Next a pneumograph was installed to measure and record the medium's rate and volume of respiration. The volume showed nothing very exceptional. The rate of respiration, which, even without instruments, must have struck everyone who has sat with Rudi, showed itself to be very remarkable. Whereas Rudi's ordinary rate of respiration is 12 to 14 per minute (which is quite normal), in trance the rate is usually between 120 and 300 per minute, rising as high as 350. These two instruments, measuring the rate and vibration of the substance in the infra-red ray and Rudi's rate of respiration, were then connected with a single recording apparatus, so that they became available on one roll as parallel graphs. This led to a very striking discovery: that the rate of vibration of the substance in the infra-red ray is always exactly double the medium's rate of respiration. And as each respiratory cycle comprises two muscular acts (inspiration and expiration), it follows that the vibration of the substance in the infra-red ray synchronises with the medium's muscular action in respiration (pp. 117-30). This fact clearly opens the way to a vast field of research.

I have so far said nothing about the evidential standing of these results, nor do I propose to say much. MM. Osty describe at length in their report the precautions taken against fraud and accident (as by the use of a fixed screen between medium and sitters on the one hand and the apparatus on the other), and it is quite clear that fraud in the ordinary sense may be ruled out. There remains the possibility that Dr Osty and his collaborators are engaged in a fraudulent conspiracy. I have carefully examined the report under review from this point of view and I have also had the opportunity of inspecting the apparatus *in situ* and of putting a series of questions to Dr Osty. As a result I am quite satisfied that even if Dr Osty and his collaborators were engaged in a fraudulent conspiracy (an assumption it is a little difficult to discuss seriously) they would not have been able, under the conditions of these sittings, to reproduce the results obtained. To take only one example, it would appear to be to all intents and purposes impossible for the ordinary person to maintain for hours on end (with short intervals) a rate of respiration in the average fifteen times greater than normal. In congratulating MM. Osty on this contribution of capital importance to the study of parapsychical phenomena, I should like to thank them and Mlle Galloy, who took the notes at the sittings, for the kind and courteous way in which they answered all my questions.

If it is not improper to end on a personal note, I should like to put it clearly on record, as I have not hesitated to express myself in

print on several occasions in terms very critical of all parapsychical phenomena, that I am satisfied, *failing the discovery by the investigators of unforeseen circumstances*, that the medium Rudi Schneider did during the sittings under review extrude under partial mental control an invisible and non-photographable substance capable of partly absorbing and/or refracting an infra-red ray and of oscillating in it at a rate double that of his rate of respiration. At the same time, in view of the revolutionary nature of the discovery, it would be as well to suspend a final judgment until MM. Osty have had an opportunity of completing their investigations, and until the necessary control experiments have been carried out.